



Fact Sheet

SC Department of Health and Environmental Control • 2600 Bull Street • www.scdhec.net • Promoting and protecting the health of the public and the environment.

On March 25, 2008, the Food Lion supermarket at 3890 S. Kings Highway in Myrtle Beach voluntarily closed after samples indicated asbestos on surfaces inside the store. The asbestos is believed to be from the removal of floor tiles and mastic (glue) in the store.

According to the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, we are all exposed to low levels of asbestos in the air we breathe. It is a mineral that has a wide range of uses.

The following questions and answers from DHEC's State Environmental Epidemiologist Erik R. Svendsen, PhD., MS provide guidance for customers of the store to use in deciding whether to keep any of the products purchased from the grocery between Feb. 18 and March 25, 2008.

Are the items purchased from this store safe to handle or eat?

If properly sealed and stored at the store, the food inside the container should not have been exposed and should be safe to eat. Because it is possible that the packaging may have dust containing asbestos fibers, care should be used in handling these items to minimize releasing the dust back into the air. If you wish to minimize your potential risk, place the food items inside sealable plastic containers or bags and throw them into the trash.

If you wish to keep the items, wash the cans or plastic containers with soap and water to avoid rubbing off any asbestos during handling. Unsealed produce should be thrown away in a sealed plastic container or bag.

I have already eaten food products purchased from this store. I also shop in that store regularly. Should I go or take my children to the doctor for tests?

No. At this time, we do not anticipate that there would be any immediate health risks to anyone from these exposures. The majority of asbestos-related illnesses do not present themselves for many years. Smokers and people with compromised airway clearance conditions such as Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease, Emphysema, Cystic Fibrosis or Asthma are at increased risk of health problems associated with asbestos exposure. The greater risk of asbestos exposure is long-term following repeated exposures.

Could this make other existing medical conditions like Asthma worse?

Since the levels of asbestos were low, we do not anticipate that this would contribute to any problems with existing medical conditions.

Should I be worried this could make me sick in years to come?

It is extremely unlikely since these exposures were for a very short duration and at levels which were not extremely high in the air.

Could other items in my kitchen cabinets be contaminated?

We would not anticipate there would be much contamination from the store's food to the other food in your cabinets or pantry at home. It is possible that some asbestos-containing dust could be transferred from the purchased food to the stored food but such contamination would be low.

How can I clean my cabinets or other surfaces after removing the items?

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral fiber and can be easily cleaned with soap and water. Do not try to clean the dust off the surfaces with a dry method such as a dust cloth. Use soap and water for best results. Cloths used in the cleaning process may be discarded in the trash or washed with soap and water for possible reuse.

What precautions should I take during cleaning like wearing a mask, gloves or other protective clothing?

While it is extremely unlikely that the exposure levels would have any long-term health effects, the primary concern with asbestos is with exposure to the lungs, so you may consider precautions to minimize exposure to the dust from re-suspending the dust in the air to be breathed in later. We recommend using a simple dust mask placed over your nose and mouth while cleaning food products. To minimize contamination to other objects or surfaces, you may wear gloves and clean up the dust using soap and water.

Should I decontaminate my car?

It is most likely the food items were contained in plastic or paper bags, which would have minimized any contamination. If there was a large amount of unbagged grocery items placed in your vehicle, then a wet vacuum while wearing a dust mask is recommended.

What should I and my family do about the clothes I wore when I was in the store?

Simply washing the clothes should clean asbestos dust off your clothes.

I keep the grocery bags from this Food Lion store. What should I do with them?

Throw them in the trash.

I work in the business next to the Food Lion...could the asbestos have gotten outside the store, could I have breathed it in while working?

While workers inside the store were likely exposed, it is unlikely that anyone outside of the store would have been exposed from this activity.